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THE METAPHYSICAL SHAKESPEARE

AN INTERPRETATION

THE MERCHANT OF VENICE



The Metaphysical Shakespeare

Each Interpretation is a Key
to the Play it Accompanies
and Proves that the Only
Basis upon which Shake-
speare built his Dramas was
the Bible. ❧ ❧ ❧ ❧

The Merchant of Venice

A Metaphysical
Interpretation by

JULIA RUGGLES

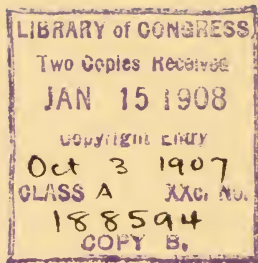
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~~Shakespeariana~~

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BLESSED IS HE THAT READ-
ETH, AND THEY THAT HEAR
THE WORDS OF THIS PROPHECY,
AND KEEP THOSE
THINGS WHICH ARE WRIT-
TEN THEREIN: FOR THE TIME
IS AT HAND.

INTRODUCTION.

INTRODUCTION.

It is now three hundred years since Shakespeare wrote his matchless plays, but it is only during the last century that they have been brought forward artistically, critically and educationally, by scholar, actor and lover of the drama. Today they stand supreme among the world's masterpieces and first in the affections of all English-speaking peoples. During these centuries thinkers of each generation have contributed to a voluminous mass of literature bearing on Shakespeare's works. Each play has been dissected; every character, minor and important, has been

analyzed to atoms; every possible source from which this master genius could have drawn the material for his settings has been investigated, and by this means there has been given to the world a Shakespeareana of great interest and undoubted value.

Nevertheless, the real source of his plays has never yet been named. After mature consideration, I here take the stand, without reservation, that Shakespeare's sole source of inspiration was the Bible.

It was his deliberate intention to dramatize the fundamental teachings of Christianity, so far as he understood them. This was his Alpha and Omega. The simplest truths of the Scriptures inspired his liveliest scenes and most dramatic passages.

Long has the world glibly referred to "Shakespeare and the Bible," and all unconsciously has it accorded to them, on the ascending scale, their normal relation to one another, "Shakespeare and the Bible."

The teachings of the Bible, uncolored by doctrine, dogma, creed and ritual, are the truth about God, man and the universe; and the plays are based upon these teachings, and upon nothing else. They have lived, therefore, in the hearts of the people to feed and satisfy the craving for truth. Today, as never before, does the proud knee of intellect and ecclesiasticism bow to the simple, but potent, teachings of Jesus, who spake in parable and diminutive drama as never man spake; and from Galilean hill-sides

reiterated the eternal facts of man's unity with God, and the New Commandment, love, as his only government. Only as "earthly power" yields to the sway of mercy can it "show likest God's." The Master knew that Christianity as He preached and practiced it, would be obliged, and could afford, to wait for its certain and universal recognition.

When this, too, dawned upon Shakespeare's mind, he determined to evolve a form through which he could picture forth to his fellow man what he conceived to be the exact and simple truth concerning the operation of spiritual law, and reveal, without arousing antagonism, the knowledge that certain benefits, including ultimate salvation, accrue to man when

he accepts its imperative demands.

The literary form chosen by Shakespeare was the most despised of his day. It was the Drama. Until the establishment of the Stuarts upon the throne of England, English had been the language of the masses; the classes still spoke in French and wrote in Latin. Latin was the tongue in which most of the religious teachings of the world were then couched, and it was the language in which the Bible had existed for hundreds of years. Tyn-dale and Wyckliffe had at the peril of their lives translated the Bible into English, but the Scriptures read from them were not yet in full favor. Latin was pointed to by all scholars as the permanent language of elegant literature. English was to be the speech

of the middle classes and peasantry. So convinced of this was Francis Bacon that he translated many of his works written in English into Latin to preserve them to posterity.

The King James version of the Bible was made from the four English Bibles then already in existence, and it was his royal word that put forward in England the first of the two powerful influences which decided the future of the English language. The other potent influence was Shakespeare. Shakespeare not only hid his precious secret away in the humble form of the drama, but he also framed his immortal message in the despised language of the people. As a result of the simultaneous appearance of the King James Bible and the plays of

Shakespeare in this tongue, English was discovered to possess an unsuspected elegance. Other writers of this period felt the radiance of this uplifting influence without understanding it, and the literature of England leaped at a single bound into the leadership of the world's masterpieces. Just so surely as there is no standard superior to that we call Shakespearean, just so surely will his language girdle the globe and help to take the English Bible with it.

Shakespeare in adopting the drama flung the classic unities to the four winds. He used the literature of all lands to supply his settings, dressed the heroes of history in colors to please himself, but he never wavered from his central theme—the triumph

of righteousness through man when governed by spiritual law, which preserves him from harm; and the inevitable self-destruction of evil, including the evil-doer, unless its snake-like spell is checked and turned down upon its belly to eat the dust of its own sacrilegious argument.

The religious world of Shakespeare's day was too confused to receive this lesson from his pen. Today the church is broader in its every outlook. The intellectual and scientific world of Shakespeare's day was occupied in splitting hairs on non-essentials. Today it is prepared to welcome anything that contributes to man's welfare and increased mental elasticity.

Shakespeare, therefore, three hun-

dred years ago laid his "pearl of great price" quietly away behind the gorgeous panorama of history and tragedy, the sparkling surface of comedy and song, knowing that the full import of his message would reach, at the appointed hour, a generation ready to run, ready to read.

This hour has struck.

I, therefore, offer the following interpretation of *The Merchant of Venice*, knowing that the play itself will furnish adequate proof that this reading is correct. In this play

Antonio represents the average moralist seeking the world's good opinion.

The Venetian Law represents human law unable to save man from sin and death, because of its own self-

created limitations.

Shylock represents the Mosaic law.

Portia represents the Ideal—the higher Hebrew law now called Christian—which says: “Love is the fulfilling of the law,” *i. e.*, the old Mosaic law.

Portia's Suitors represent the world in pursuit of a false concept of the Ideal; judging according to appearances.

Bassanio represents those who correctly perceive the Ideal, by abandoning the material sense of it, and through “righteous judgment,” judging not according to appearances, enter into the possession of it.

Belmont represents the home of the Ideal, where the fulfillment is achieved.

SHAKESPEARE.

I see all human wits
Are measured, but a few;
Unmeasured still my Shakespeare
sits,
Lone as the Blessed Jew.

RALPH WALDO EMERSON.



THE METAPHYSICAL
INTERPRETATION
OF
THE MERCHANT OF VENICE.

THE MERCHANT OF VENICE.

Venice in Shakespeare's day was the center of both the financial and legal world. Standing as she did at the head of the Adriatic sea, she was the one objective point on the great commercial highway between the east and the west. The treasures of the Orient—gems, rugs, spices, gums, ivory, gold, candied fruits and priceless fabrics—came up over the deserts by caravan to the coast and thence were shipped to Venice. Italy was then the land of the heart's desire, and thither resorted the wealth of all

countries in pursuit of both the pleasure and the gain that attends always upon the incoming of ships.

Venetian law was so exact in its execution of justice that its standards upheld all the lesser courts of Europe. In this play the Venetian law typifies the assumed infallibility of human law to adequately protect man. Shylock naturally looks to the hitherto unquestioned legal standard of the Venetian court for support in claiming all that his bond gives him. When Salarino says:

Salarino.

I am sure the duke
Will never grant this forfeiture to hold.

Act III, Scene 3.

Antonio replies:

Antonio.

The duke cannot deny the course of law:

For the commodity that strangers have
With us in Venice, if it be denied,
Will much impeach the justice of the state;
Since that the trade and profit of the city
Consisteth of all nations.

Act III, Scene 3.

And later Portia adds in support of
the honor of Venetian law:

Portia.

There is no power in Venice
Can alter a decree established:
'Twill be recorded for a precedent,
And many an error by the same example
Will rush into the state: it cannot be.

Act IV, Scene 1.

And following her matchless appeal
to the Jew for mercy, she says:

Portia.

I have spoke thus much
To mitigate the justice of thy plea;
Which if thou follow, this strict court of Venice
Must needs give sentence 'gainst the merchant

24 THE MERCHANT OF VENICE

there.

Act IV, Scene 1.

This play is based upon three of the simplest and most radical of the teachings of the Bible:

“Judge not according to the appearance, but judge righteous judgment.”

“He that loseth his life for my sake shall find it.”

“Love is the fulfilling of the law.”

The dramatic form upon which this play is built is that of the Opinion. The repetition of the word opinion and its sister qualities in this play is interesting and significant. The positive side of a dramatic principle possesses necessarily its negative or reverse, which is used scientifically by Shakespeare as an essential accom-

paniment to the development of the main idea. This negative condition is the reverse of all that constitutes righteous judgment, *i. e.*, opinion. An opinion is a mental outlook for which man gives a reason. This ability to reason skillfully, when developed, becomes judgment. The reverse of this is prejudice. A prejudice is that outlook upon things or people for which no reason can be given, and of all twists aside of which the human mind is capable, it is the most impossible to straighten, for it is without genuine mental foundation. Shakespeare selected for his dramatized negative the racial hatred of the Jew—a prejudice so deeply rooted in the minds of all people that it seems like a hopeless task to think of ever

removing it. This antagonism against the Hebrew race antedates the Christian era and is as old as the history of the race itself. Why? Because while their neighbors were bowing down in worship to many material forms, the Hebrews elevated their worship of God into Mind, and cried, that they might be known of all men, "Hear, O Israel, the Lord our God is One Lord," and "Thou shalt have no other gods before me."

Jesus, born of the tribe of Judah, came in due time, adding His testimony to that of Moses and the prophets, "I come not to destroy, but to fulfill the law," and "A new commandment give I unto you, that ye love one another."

Hence, in this wonderful dramati-

zation of the imperious demands of Christianity upon human capacities, Shylock and his sense of justice represent the Mosaic law, which says, "An eye for an eye, and a tooth for a tooth," while Portia is the embodiment of the "new commandment"—love—which shows "likest God's," when mercy seasons the human sense of justice.

This wonderful race was hated by all its Oriental neighbors, constantly persecuted and conquered until they were swallowed up in the immensity of the Roman Empire. In every age they were, as they still are, the most remarkable people that have ever trod the globe. They have been the thinkers, prophets, seers, and supreme idealists of the world. They have

given to Christendom its Christian ideals, its Decalogue, its Sermon on the Mount, its Bible, and its hope of Immortality; for it is from the empty tomb of the Hebrew-born Jesus that there arises for the Christian the hope of eternal life. The blackest blot upon history's page is the Christian treatment of the Hebrew. It is as inexcusable as it is without parallel. They were hounded from city to city, allowed no abiding place, forced to wear a dress that was a mark of ignominy; they were locked in herds in the Ghettos of the great cities of Europe, permitted no accomplishments, allowed to enter no trade, art, profession or business, but that of money-lending. It is not surprising, therefore, that in this they were remark-

ably successful.

When Antonio and Bassanio approach Shylock for the loan of three thousand ducats, he turns upon them and, in burning words that voice the righteous indignation of his outraged race, he says:

Shylock.

Signior Antonio, many a time and oft
In the Rialto you have rated me
About my moneys and my usances:
Still have I borne it with a patient shrug,
For sufferance is the badge of all our tribe.
You call me misbeliever, cut-throat dog,
And spit upon my Jewish gaberdine,
And all for use of that which is mine own.
Well then, it now appears you need my help:
Go to, then; you come to me, and you say
'Shylock, we would have moneys;' you say so;
You, that did void your rheum upon my beard
And foot me as you spurn a stranger cur
Over your threshold: moneys is your suit.

30 THE MERCHANT OF VENICE

What should I say to you? Should I not say
'Hath a dog money? is it possible
A cur can lend three thousand ducats?' Or
Shall I bend low and in a bondman's key,
With bated breath and whispering humbleness,
Say this;
'Fair sir, you spit on me on Wednesday last;
You spurn'd me such a day; another time
You call'd me dog; and for these courtesies
I'll lend you thus much moneys?'

Act I, Scene 3.

Antonio makes a very discourteous
reply:

Antonio.

I am as like to call thee so again,
To spit on thee again, to spurn thee too.
If thou wilt lend this money, lend it not
As to thy friends; for when did friendship take
A breed for barren metal of his friend?
But lend it rather to thine enemy,
Who if he break, thou mayst with better face
Exact the penalty.

Act I, Scene 3.

When first approached by Bassanio for the loan for which Antonio should become bound, Shylock says to himself:

Shylock.

If I catch him once upon the hip,
I will feed fat the ancient grudge I bear him.
He hates our sacred nation, and he rails,
Even there where merchants most do congregate,
On me, my bargains and my well-won thrift,
Which he calls interest. Cursed be my tribe,
If I forgive him!

Act I, Scene 3.

Presentiment, intuition and superstition being akin to the central ideas, opinion and prejudice, are introduced with rare art into this play, which opens with a statement freighted with presentiment:

32 THE MERCHANT OF VENICE

Antonio.

In sooth, I know not why I am so sad :
It wearies me ; you say it wearies you ;
But how I caught it, found it, or came by it,
What stuff 'tis made of, whereof it is born,
I am to learn ;
And such a want-wit sadness makes of me
That I have much ado to know myself.

Act I, Scene 1.

and Bassanio, in the conversation which follows, has an intuition that he will be successful in his suit for Portia's hand in marriage.

Bassanio.

O my Antonio, had I but the means
To hold a rival place with one of them,
(i. e., *Portia's suitors.*)
I have a mind presages me such thrift,
That I should questionless be fortunate !

Act I, Scene 1.

and Shylock's presentiments ring

true, though mixed with the baser metal of superstition:

Shylock.

I am bid forth to supper, Jessica:
There are my keys. But wherefore should I
go?

I am not bid for love; they flatter me:
But yet I'll go in hate, to feed upon
The prodigal Christian. Jessica, my girl,
Look to my house. I am right loath to go:
There is some ill a-brewing towards my rest,
For I did dream of money-bags to-night.

* * * *

By Jacob's staff, I swear,
I have no mind of feasting forth tonight:
But I will go. Go you before me, sirrah;

* * * *

Perhaps I will return immediately:
Do as I bid you; shut doors after you.

Act II, Scene 5.

That night was he robbed, and by
Jessica herself, who fled from Venice

34 THE MERCHANT OF VENICE

with her Christian husband, Lorenzo, and embarked for Belmont. Shylock's alternate grieving and cursing for the loss of both his daughter and his ducats, culminates in lines that show that he could as deeply and devotedly love as he could bitterly and vindictively hate:

Tubal.

One of them showed me a ring that he had of your daughter for a monkey.

Shylock.

Out upon her! Thou torturest me, Tubal: it was my turquoise; I had it of Leah when I was a bachelor: I would not have given it for a wilderness of monkeys.

Act III, Scene 1.

Again, when asked why he prefers a pound of Antonio's flesh to his money, Shylock replies in words that never

fail to rouse sympathy in the logical mind:

Shylock.

If it will feed nothing else, it will feed my revenge. He hath disgraced me, and hindered me half a million; laughed at my losses, mocked at my gains, scorned my nation, thwarted my bargains, cooled my friends, heated mine enemies; and what's his reason? I am a Jew. Hath not a Jew eyes? hath not a Jew hands, organs, dimensions, senses, affections, passions? fed with the same food, hurt with the same weapons, subject to the same diseases, healed by the same means, warmed and cooled by the same winter and summer, as a Christian is? If you prick us, do we not bleed? if you tickle us, do we not laugh? if you poison us, do we not die? and if you wrong us, shall we not revenge? If we are like you in the rest, we will resemble you in that. If a Jew wrong a Christian, what is his humility? Revenge. If a Christian wrong a Jew, what should his sufferance be by Christian example?

36 THE MERCHANT OF VENICE

Why, revenge. The villainy you teach me, I will execute, and it shall go hard but I will better the instruction.

Act III, Scene 1.

Antonio is the embodiment of both the positive and the negative qualities that emphasize the Christian gentleman. He is high-minded, moral, generous and gifted with a capacity to love so great that he lays down his life for his friend Bassanio, who comes to him saying:

Bassanio.

To you, Antonio,
I owe the most, in money and in love,
And from your love I have a warranty
To unburden all my plots and purposes
How to get clear of all the debts I owe.

Antonio.

I pray you, good Bassanio, let me know it;
And if it stand, as you yourself still do,

Within the eye of honor, be assured,
 My purse, my person, my extremest means,
 Lie all unlock'd to your occasions.

* * * *

You know me well, and herein spend but time
 To wind about my love with circumstance;
 And out of doubt you do me now more wrong
 In making question of my uttermost
 Than if you had made waste of all I have:
 Then do but say to me what I should do
 That in your knowledge may by me be done,
 And I am prest unto it: therefore speak.

Act I, Scene 1.

Bassanio then tells of his suit for Portia's hand in marriage, and of his need of money for the suitable conduct of it, to which Antonio replies:

Antonio.

Thou know'st that all my fortunes are at sea;
 Neither have I money nor commodity
 To raise a present sum: therefore go forth;
 Try what my credit can in Venice do:

38 THE MERCHANT OF VENICE

That shall be rack'd, even to the uttermost,
To furnish thee to Belmont, to fair Portia.
Go, presently inquire, and so will I,
Where money is, and I no question make
To have it of my trust or for my sake.

Act I, Scene 1.

They go together to Shylock, who
makes with Antonio the following
compact:

Shylock.

Go with me to a notary, seal me there
Your single bond; and, in a merry sport,
If you repay me not on such a day,
In such a place, such sum or sums as are
Express'd in the condition, let the forfeit
Be nominated for an equal pound
Of your fair flesh, to be cut off and taken
In what part of your body pleaseth me.

Antonio.

Content, i' faith: I'll seal to such a bond
And say there is much kindness in the Jew.

Bassanio.

You shall not seal to such a bond for me:
I'll rather dwell in my necessity.

Antonio.

Why, fear not, man; I will not forfeit it:
Within these two months, that's a month before
This bond expires, I do expect return
Of thrice three times the value of this bond.

Act I, Scene 3.

When, three months later, Antonio's ships have not come to port and Shylock is vindictively claiming the forfeiture, Salarino says of Antonio:

Salarino.

A kinder gentleman treads not the earth.
I saw Bassanio and Antonio part:
Bassanio told him he would make some speed
Of his return: he answer'd, 'Do not so;
Slubber not business for my sake, Bassanio,
But stay the very riping of the time;
And for the Jew's bond which he hath of me,
Let it not enter in your mind of love:

40 THE MERCHANT OF VENICE

* * * *

And even there, his eye being big with tears,
Turning his face, he put his hand behind him,
And with affection wondrous sensible
He wrung Bassanio's hand ; and so they parted.
and Salanio adds :

Salanio.

I think he only loves the world for him.
I pray thee, let us go and find him out
And quicken his embraced heaviness
With some delight or other.

Act II, Scene 8.

When Bassanio receives the news
of Antonio's inability to pay the ducats
and communicates it to Portia, we
learn that Antonio was :

Bassanio.

The dearest friend, the kindest man,
The best-condition'd and unwearied spirit
In doing courtesies, and one in whom
The ancient Roman honour more appears
Than any that draws breath in Italy.

Portia.

What sum owes he the Jew?

Bassanio.

For me three thousand ducats.

Portia.

What, no more?

Pay him six thousand, and deface the bond;
Double six thousand, and then treble that,
Before a friend of this description
Shall lose a hair through Bassanio's fault.

Act III, Scene 2.

In court, when Antonio feels that the arm of the law is powerless to extricate him from the meshes that his own and the Jew's lawless hatred has woven about him, he says:

Antonio.

I am arm'd and well prepared.
Give me your hand, Bassanio: fare you well!
Grieve not that I am fallen to this for you;
For herein Fortune shows herself more kind

42 THE MERCHANT OF VENICE

Than is her custom: it is still her use
To let the wretched man outlive his wealth,
To view with hollow eye and wrinkled brow
An age of poverty; from which lingering pen-
ance

Of such a misery doth she cut me off.
Commend me to your honourable wife:
Tell her the process of Antonio's end;
Say how I loved you, speak me fair in death;
And, when the tale is told, bid her be judge
Whether Bassanio had not once a love.

Act IV, Scene 1.

But this love is limited and does not
extend to the Jew, his neighbor, upon
whom he spits freely and knows only
by the name of dog; to which indig-
nity Shylock pertinently replies:

Shylock.

Thou call'dst me dog before thou hadst a cause;
But, since I am a dog, beware my fangs.

Act III, Scene 3.

Such respect has Antonio for the

world's estimation of riches, and of the man who possesses them, that he prefers death to advanced years, unless accompanied with wealth. Gratiano has already advised him not to fish "for this fool-gudgeon—this opinion."

Gratiano.

Signior Antonio;

You have too much respect upon the world:
They lose it that do buy it with much care.

Act I, Scene I.

The loss of the world's estimation robbed the grave for him of its sting. This ignominious attitude toward money is in sharp contrast to that of Portia's. She only wished "In virtues, beauties, livings, friends, to exceed account," that she might enrich another.

44 THE MERCHANT OF VENICE

Portia steps before us appealing for sympathy: “By my troth, Nerissa, my little body is aweary of this great world.”

Portia.

But this reasoning is not in the fashion to choose me a husband. O me, the word ‘choose’! I may neither choose whom I would nor refuse whom I dislike; so is the will of a living daughter curbed by the will of a dead father. Is it not hard, Nerissa, that I cannot choose one nor refuse none?

Nerissa.

Your father was ever virtuous; and holy men at their death have good inspirations: therefore the lottery, that he hath devised in these three chests of gold, silver and lead, whereof who chooses his meaning chooses you, will, no doubt, never be chosen by any rightly but one who shall rightly love.

*

*

*

*

Do you not remember, lady, in your father’s

time, a Venetian, a scholar and a soldier, that came hither in company of the Marquis of Montferrat?

Portia.

Yes, yes, it was Bassanio; as I think, he was so called.

Nerissa.

True, madam: he, of all the men that ever my foolish eyes looked upon, was the best deserving a fair lady.

Portia.

I remember him well, and I remember him worthy of thy praise.

Act I, Scene 2.

And later, when Bassanio stands before the caskets, to win or lose her, Portia says:

Portia.

Away, then! I am lock'd in one of them:
If you do love me, you will find me out.

Act III, Scene 2

46 THE MERCHANT OF VENICE

Portia typifies throughout this play, the Ideal for which every man who is born into the world strives.

‘Who chooseth me shall gain what many men desire.’

Why, that’s the lady ; all the world desires her ;
From the four corners of the earth they come,
To kiss this shrine, this mortal breathing saint :
The Hyrcanian deserts and the vastly wilds
Of wide Arabia are as throughfares now
For princes to come view fair Portia :
The watery kingdom, whose ambitious head
Spits in the face of heaven, is no bar
To stop the foreign spirits, but they come,
As o’er a brook, to see fair Portia.

Act II, Scene 7.

Lorenzo.

How cheer’st thou, Jessica?
And now, good sweet, say thy opinion,
How dost thou like the Lord Bassanio’s wife??

Jessica.

Past all expressing. It is very meet

The Lord Bassanio live an upright life;
 For, having such a blessing in his lady,
 He finds the joys of heaven here on earth;

* * * *

Why, if two gods should play some heavenly
 match

And on the wager lay two earthly women,
 And Portia one, there must be something else
 Pawn'd with the other, for the poor rude world
 Hath not her fellow.

Act III, Scene 5.

Bassanio.

In Belmont is a lady richly left;
 And she is fair and, fairer than that word,
 Of wondrous virtues: sometimes from her eyes
 I did receive fair speechless messages:
 Her name is Portia, nothing undervalued
 To Cato's daughter, Brutus' Portia:
 Nor is the wide world ignorant of her worth,
 For the four winds blow in from every coast
 Renowned suitors, and her sunny locks
 Hang on her temples like a golden fleece;
 Which makes her seat of Belmont Colchos'

48 THE MERCHANT OF VENICE

strand,
And many Jasons come in quest of her.

Act I, Scene 1.

In ancient Greece, the Golden Fleece hidden on Colchos' strand typified this same idea, and the story goes that when Jason had successfully braved incredible dangers for the possession of it and had brought it home and placed it in the temple, each person who made the effort to view its loveliness saw therein embodied his own highest sense of beauty. Therefore, since Portia typifies in this play the ideal, her home, Belmont is artistically introduced by Shakespeare as "Colchos' strand," and her suitors as "many Jasons who come in search of her."

Here, of necessity, in the home of

the Ideal, Belmont, the height of beauty, must the masculine representative meet the feminine representative of the Ideal; thus revealing through dramatic and romantic scenes the fact that all heavenly qualities unite in each individual consciousness to satisfy man that he is indeed God's image and likeness. Here at Belmont "all journeys end lovers' meeting," and here, therefore, as the play progresses, do all the leading characters, except Shylock, gather in happy union.

The symbolic interest of this play centers in the casket scenes, and culminates in the court room. The inscriptions upon the caskets are freighted with peculiar significance, and are the direct outcome of the ba-

50 THE MERCHANT OF VENICE

sic ideas upon which this play rests.

The first, of gold, who this inscription bears,
'Who chooseth me shall gain what many men
desire;'

The second, silver, which this promise carries,
'Who chooseth me shall get as much as he
deserves;'

This third, dull lead, with warning all as blunt,
'Who chooseth me must give and hazard
all he hath.'

How shall I know if I do choose the right?

Act II, Scene 7.

The Prince of Morocco, from African shores, beturbaned and bejeweled, black as the ace of spades, and consumed with self-love, addresses himself to Portia for personal approval, but is turned of necessity by her to the resources of his own judgment. He knows that "appearances are against him," and with mingled fear

and vanity he says to Portia :

Morocco.

Mislike me not for my complexion,
The shadow'd livery of the burnish'd sun,
To whom I am a neighbor and near bred.
Bring me the fairest creature northward born,
Where Phoebus' fire scarce thaws the icicles,
And let us make incision for your love,
To prove whose blood is reddest, his or mine.
I tell thee, lady, this aspect of mine
Hath fear'd the valiant : by my love, I swear
The best-regarded virgins of our clime
Have loved it too : I would not change this hue,
Except to steal your thoughts, my gentle queen.

Portia.

In terms of choice I am not solely led
By nice direction of a maiden's eyes ;
Besides, the lottery of my destiny
Bars me the right of voluntary choosing :
But if my father had not scanted me,
And hedged me by his wit, to yield myself
His wife who wins me by that means I told
you,

52 THE MERCHANT OF VENICE

Yourself, renowned prince, then stood as fair
As any comer I have look'd on yet
For my affection.

Morocco.

Even for that I thank you :
Therefore, I pray you, lead me to the caskets
To try my fortune.

Act II, Scene 1.

As he stands before the caskets he
fervently ejaculates, "Some god di-
rect my judgment."

Morocco.

Let me see ;

I will survey the inscriptions back again.

What says this leaden casket ?

'Who chooseth me must give and hazard all he
hath.'

Must give ! for what ? for lead ? hazard for lead ?

This casket threatens. Men that hazard all

Do it in hope of fair advantages :

A golden mind stoops not to shows of dross ;

I'll then nor give nor hazard aught for lead.

What says the silver with her virgin hue?
 'Who chooseth me shall get as much as he
 deserves.'

As much as he deserves? Pause there, Mo-
 rocco,

And weigh thy value with an even hand:
 If thou be'st rated by thy estimation,
 Thou dost deserve enough; and yet enough
 May not extend so far as to the lady:
 And yet to be afraid of my deserving
 Were but a weak disabling of myself.
 As much as I deserve! Why, that's the lady:
 I do in birth deserve her, and in fortunes,
 In graces and in qualities of breeding;
 But more than these, in love I do deserve.
 What if I stray'd no further, but chose here?
 Let's see once more this saying graved in gold;
 'Who chooseth me shall gain what many men
 desire.'

Why, that's the lady; all the world desires her;
 From the four corners of the earth they come,
 To kiss this shrine, this mortal breathing saint:
 The Hyrcanian deserts and the vasty wilds

54 THE MERCHANT OF VENICE

Of wide Arabia are as throughfares now
For princes to come view fair Portia:
The watery kingdom, whose ambitious head
Spits in the face of heaven, is no bar
To stop the foreign spirits, but they come,
As o'er a brook, to see fair Portia.
One of these three contains her heavenly picture.

Is't like that lead contains her? 'Twere damnation

To think so base a thought: it were too gross
To rib her cerecloth in the obscure grave.
Or shall I think in silver she's immured,
Being ten times undervalued to tried gold?
O sinful thought! Never so rich a gem
Was set in worse than gold. They have in
England

A coin that bears the figure of an angel
Stamped in gold, but that's insculp'd upon;
But here an angel in a golden bed
Lies all within. Deliver me the key:
Here do I choose, and thrive I as I may!

Portia.

There, take it, prince; and if my form lie there,

Then I am yours.

(He unlocks the golden casket.)

Morocco.

O hell! what have we here?

A carrion Death, within whose empty eye
There is a written scroll! I'll read the writing.

(Reads) All that glisters is not gold;

Often have you heard that told:

Many a man his life hath sold

But my outside to behold:

Gilded tombs do worms infold.

Had you been as wise as bold,

Young in limbs, in judgement old,

Your answer had not been inscroll'd:

Fare you well; your suit is cold.

Act II, Scene 7.

With the dismissal of Morocco, arrives Arragon, suave, hopeful and secure in his sense of his own superior discernment and deservings. As he stands before the caskets he exclaims with elated confidence:

56 THE MERCHANT OF VENICE

Arragon.

Fortune now
To my heart's hope! Gold; silver; and base
lead.

'Who chooseth me must give and hazard all
he hath.'

You shall look fairer, ere I give or hazard.
What says the golden chest? ha! let me see:
'Who chooseth me shall gain what many men
desire.'

What many men desire! that 'many' may be
meant

By the fool multitude, that choose by show,
Not learning more than the fond eye doth
teach;

Which pries not to the interior, but, like the-
martlet,

Builds in the weather on the outward wall,
Even in the force and road of casualty.

I will not choose what many men desire,
Because I will not jump with common spirits
And rank me with the barbarous multitudes.

Why, then to thee, thou silver treasure-house;

Tell me once more what title thou dost bear :
 'Who chooseth me shall get as much as he de-
 serves :'

And well said too ; for who shall go about
 To cozen fortune and be honourable
 Without the stamp of merit? Let none pre-
 sume

To wear an undeserved dignity.
 O, that estates, degrees and offices
 Were not derived corruptly, and that clear hon-
 our

Were purchased by the merit of the wearer!
 How many then should cover that stand bare!
 How many be commanded that command!
 How much low peasantry would then be
 glean'd

From the true seed of honour! and how much
 honour

Pick'd from the chaff and ruin of the times
 To be new-varnish'd! Well, but to my choice:
 'Who chooseth me shall get as much as he de-
 serves.'

I will assume desert. Give me a key for this,

58 THE MERCHANT OF VENICE

And instantly unlock my fortunes here.

(He opens the silver casket.)

Portia.

Too long a pause for that which you find there.

Arragon.

What's here? the portrait of a blinking idiot,
Presenting me a schedule! I will read it.

How much unlike art thou to Portia!

How much unlike my hopes and my deserv-
ings!

'Who chooseth me shall get as much as he
deserves.'

Did I deserve no more than a fool's head?

Is that my prize? are my deserts no better?

Portia.

To offend, and judge, are distinct offices
And of opposed natures.

Arragon.

What is here?

(Reads) The fire seven times tried this:

Seven times tried that judgment is,
That did never choose amiss.

Some there be that shadows kiss ;
Such have but a shadow's bliss :
There be fools alive, I wis,
Silver'd o'er ; and so was this.
Take what wife you will to bed,
I will ever be your head :
So be gone, sir : you are sped.

Still more fool I shall appear
By the time I linger here :
With one fool's head I came to woo,
But I go away with two.

Act II, Scene 9.

Thus does Shakespeare depict the power of the sinuous false logic of appearances to lead heated ambition and calculating worldliness to place their ideal in merely material conditions. When they have cast in their all for what they did desire, and for what they claimed as their desert, their reward is even a carrion death and a

blinking idiocy.

With Arragon's exit, Bassanio enters the arena. Of Bassanio we are told nothing directly and everything indirectly. He, and he only, had penetrated far enough into the home of the Ideal to have received from Portia's eyes fair speechless messages, which informed him that he should "questionless be fortunate," if he but pursued his suit in the face of all obstacles to its end. Bassanio had in his favor, birth, breeding and correct idealistic perceptions, but he had no money. This is error's last contemptible weapon in seeking to prevent the consummation of idealistic conditions for man. The "earth always helps the woman," and Antonio's boundless affection for Bassa-

nio, in whom he sees a type of his own ideal fulfilled, provides the necessary material equipment for the progress of the idea towards its goal—this home of the good and the true where finally all the leading characters of the play, except Shylock, meet in happy union.

As Bassanio stands before the caskets he presents a striking contrast to his predecessors. In support of the key-note of this play, "Judge not by appearance, but judge righteous judgment," the leaden casket bears the inscription, "Who chooseth me must give and hazard all he hath." What ideal is that for which man will not give and hazard all he hath? This is the test of our desire and our deserts. Bassanio having sought first

his highest understanding of love, and glad to have something demanded of him in proof of his capacity to love, had all these things represented by the gold and silver caskets added, as a natural sequence, unto him.

Shakespeare introduces at this point this song:

SONG.

Tell me where is fancy bred,
Or in the heart or in the head?
How begot, how nourished?

Reply, reply.

It is engender'd in the eyes,
With gazing fed; and fancy dies
In the cradle where it lies.

Let us all ring fancy's knell:
I'll begin it,—Ding, dong, bell.

Act III, Scene 2.

“It is neither of the heart nor of the head; it is not begot nor nour-

ished. It is by gazing fed. It is engendered in the eyes and there it dies." No one metaphysical doctrine is so dramatized by Shakespeare as the subtle power of the eyes to deceive. It is the whole theme of some of his plays, and the analysis of it will frequently appear in these Interpretations. The eye, when governed by spiritual perception, which judges not at all by the things which are seen and temporal, but by things which are not seen and are eternal, is the guide to righteous judgment. The mathematical reversal of this is fancy, mesmerism, that presents itself through material forms to beguile, to befool, deceive, ruin poor misguided mortals who believe that desire and desert can be satisfied in the gratification of ma-

terial possession.

The mesmeric spell of appearance had long since been conquered by Bassanio, whose first words are :

Bassanio.

So may the outward shows be least themselves ;
The world is still deceived with ornament.

In law, what plea so tainted and corrupt
But, being season'd with a gracious voice,
Obscures the show of evil? In religion,
What damned error, but some sober brow
Will bless it and approve it with a text,
Hiding the grossness with fair ornament?

There is no vice so simple but assumes
Some mark of virtue on his outward parts :
How many cowards, whose hearts are all as
false

As stairs of sand, wear yet upon their chins
The beards of Hercules and frowning Mars,
Who, inward search'd, have livers white as
milk ;

And these assume but valour's excrement

To render them redoubted! Look on beauty,
And you shall see 'tis purchased by the weight;
Which therein works a miracle in nature,
Making them lightest that wear most of it:
So are those crisped snaky golden locks
Which make such wanton gambols with the
wind,

Upon supposed fairness, often known
To be the dowry of a second head,
The skull that bred them in a sepulchre.
Thus ornament is but the gilded shore
To a most dangerous sea; the beauteous scarf
Veiling an Indian beauty; in a word,
The seeming truth which cunning times put on
To entrap the wisest. Therefore, thou gaudy
gold,

Hard food for Midas, I will none of thee;
Nor none of thee, thou pale and common
drudge

'Tween man and man: but thou, thou meagre
lead,

Which rather threatenest than dost promise
aught,

66 THE MERCHANT OF VENICE

Thy paleness moves me more than eloquence;
And here choose I: joy be the consequence!

What find I here?

(Opening the leaden casket.)

Fair Portia's counterfeit! What demi-god
Hath come so near creation? Move these eyes?
Or whether, riding on the balls of mine,
Seem they in motion? Here are sever'd lips,
Parted with sugar breath: so sweet a bar
Should sunder such sweet friends. Here in
her hairs

The painter plays the spider and hath woven
A golden mesh to entrap the hearts of men
Faster than gnats in cobwebs: but her eyes,—
How could he see to do them? having made
one,

Methinks it should have power to steal both his
And leave itself unfurnish'd. Yet look, how far
The substance of my praise doth wrong this
shadow.

In underprising it, so far this shadow
Doth limp behind the substance. Here's the
scroll,

The continent and summary of my fortune.

(*Reads*) You that choose not by the view,
 Chance as fair and choose as true!
 Since this fortune falls to you,
 Be content and seek no new.
 If you be well pleased with this
 And hold your fortune for your bliss,
 Turn you where your lady is
 And claim her with a loving kiss.

A gentle scroll. Fair lady, by your leave;
 I come by note, to give and to receive.
 Like one of two contending in a prize,
 That thinks he hath done well in people's eyes,
 Hearing applause and universal shout,
 Giddy in spirit, still gazing in a doubt
 Whether those peals of praise be his or no,
 So, thrice-fair lady, stand I, even so;
 As doubtful whether what I say be true,
 Until confirm'd, sign'd, ratified by you.

Portia.

You see me, Lord Bassanio, where I stand,
 Such as I am; though for myself alone
 I would not be ambitious in my wish,

68 THE MERCHANT OF VENICE

To wish myself much better ; yet, for you
 I would be trebled twenty times myself ;
 A thousand times more fair, ten thousand times
 More rich ;
 That only to stand high in your account,
 I might in virtues, beauties, livings, friends,
 Exceed account ; but the full sum of me
 Is sum of—something, which, to term in gross,
 Is an unlesson'd girl, unschool'd, unpractised ;
 Happy in this, she is not yet so old
 But she may learn ; happier than this,
 She is not bred so dull but she can learn ;
 Happiest of all in that her gentle spirit
 Commits itself to yours to be directed,
 As from her lord, her governor, her king.
 Myself and what is mine to you and yours
 Is now converted : but now I was the lord
 Of this fair mansion, master of my servants,
 Queen o'er myself ; and even now, but now,
 This house, these servants and this same my-
 self

Are yours, my lord : I give them with this ring ;
 Which when you part from, lose, or give away,

Let it presage the ruin of your love
And be my vantage to exclaim on you.

Bassanio.

Madam, you have bereft me of all words,
Only my blood speaks to you in my veins;
And there is such confusion in my powers
As, after some oration fairly spoke
By a beloved prince, there doth appear
Among the buzzing, pleased multitude;
Where every something, being blent together,
Turns to a wild of nothing, save of joy,
Express'd and not express'd. But when this
ring

Parts from this finger, then parts life from
hence:

O, then be bold to say Bassanio's dead!

Act III, Scene 2.

Although Portia is now given in marriage to Bassanio by her father's will, Bassanio will not accept its provisions. His victory is not complete until "confirmed, signed, ratified" by

Portia, thus restoring to her the freedom of individual judgment, temporarily taken from her by her father.

This ideal is the manifestation of man's highest sense of goodness, beauty and truth. This can be discerned from afar, as Bassanio looked upon Portia, but the actual possession of it is only entered in upon as did Bassanio, by judging not according to appearance, but judging righteous judgment. The meaning of "He who layeth down his life for my sake shall find it," was grasped by Shakespeare and imaged forth by Bassanio, who, in his willingness to fulfill the demand of the leaden casket, and "Give and hazard all he hath," found that for which he did give and hazard.

Above and beyond all desire for ma-

terial possession lies the Ideal, hidden from all who seek her according to appearance, but generous in the complete giving of herself is she to those who silently reach out and find her in obedience to the spiritual law, which alone endows man with a capacity for righteous judgment.

In every age has the light of the spiritual ideal risen, set, and again been brought forth by one who, like Bassanio, should rightly love. The phenomenon of appearance, disappearance and reappearance has always accompanied it, because of the limited human sense that wakes and sleeps in regard to man's oneness with God, the ever-present I AM, who neither comes nor goes. This phenomenon sharply accentuates the his-

tory of Jesus' career on earth. He appeared in Bethlehem, disappeared into Egypt, and reappeared in the temple that He might be about his Father's business. He appeared in Nazareth as the son of the carpenter, disappeared into the wilderness, to reappear in Galilee, where He began His ministry. He appeared in Jerusalem for crucifixion, disappeared within a rock-bound tomb, only to reappear in a Garden. His appearance on the shores of the Galilean sea was followed by his disappearance in ascension, and since He said, "Lo, I am with you always," therefore his final reappearing will of necessity be impersonal and permanent.

Portia's humor is tinged with wisdom, and her keen sense of justice

with mercy. When she finds that Bassanio's friend Antonio stands in danger of his life for the want of a few thousand ducats, she instantly supplies thrice the amount. Money is readily used by Portia for such a friend! Rising in the scale of idealism, Portia next proposes that she and Bassanio give up their wedding day to the saving of this friend's life, and the culmination of her understanding of the spiritual law of unselfed love is when, in the court scene which follows swiftly on the heels of her marriage, she tries to save the Jew from his own undoing.

Under the effulgence of the wisdom and love that Portia brought to bear upon the ignorance of hate and malice that had struck at Antonio's life,

those evils were arrested and driven out. Human justice would have been obliged to give Shylock his bond. The appearance of the law justified it, and all, including the powerful Duke of Venice himself, were powerless under its rigid exactions to save the life of a fellow man. It was to the heavenly sense of mercy that the flaws in the bond framed by malice and hate were revealed; for "Love is the fulfilling of the law." Portia is never so plainly the dramatization of man's capacity to show "likeliest God's" as she is when, kindly, persuasively, does she try to win the Jew to take the money so precious she knows to him, and which he will surely lose if he refuse it thrice in court.

Portia.

Shylock, there's thrice thy money offer'd thee.

*

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Be merciful:

Take thrice thy money; bid me tear the bond.

Act IV, Scene I.

The enriching of the Jew by many times the original amount borrowed was offered by Portia from out the wealth of her own coffers. She is not introduced by Shakespeare to trap the wretched Jew, but to heal and save him from himself; otherwise how could she consistently say, "Then must the Jew be merciful?" Could Shakespeare allow her to ask more of the Jew, with his burden of wrongs, than she herself could give from the abundance of her heaven-endowed perception that love is the fulfilling of the law?

If this metaphysical understanding of law, which is always merciful, were the established code in use in the legal world today, how different would be the attitude of stern justice toward the defiant criminal at the bar. How invaluable would it be in detecting and destroying the evil motive that alone produces the criminal act, thus protecting the innocent and aiding in the release of the prisoner from the bondage of vice and the oft-time bated desire for evil doing. How much greater protection to public morals this would be than sending the wretched and protesting victim to the electric chair, or gallows, while all his undestroyed desires angrily multiply and react upon unguarded consciousness, to find ten channels of activity

to the one ignorantly destroyed.

The trial proceeds:

Duke.

Antonio and old Shylock, both stand forth.

Portia.

Is your name Shylock?

Shylock.

Shylock is my name

Portia.

Of a strange nature is the suit you follow;
Yet in such rule that the Venetian law
Cannot impugn you as you do proceed.
You stand within his danger, do you not?

Antonio.

Ay, so he says.

Portia.

Do you confess the bond?

Antonio.

I do.

3
3 3 3
3 3 3
3 3 3

Portia.

Then must the Jew be merciful.

78 THE MERCHANT OF VENICE

Shylock.

On what compulsion must I? tell me that.

Portia.

The quality of mercy is not strain'd;
 It droppeth as the gentle rain from heaven
 Upon the place beneath; it is twice blest;
 It blesseth him that gives and him that takes:
 'Tis mightiest in the mightiest: it becomes
 The throned monarch better than his crown;
 His sceptre shows the force of temporal power,
 The attribute to awe and majesty,
 Wherein doth sit the dread and fear of kings;
 But mercy is above this sceptred sway;
 It is enthroned in the hearts of kings,
 It is an attribute to God himself;
 And earthly power doth then show likest God's
 When mercy seasons justice. Therefore, Jew,
 Though justice be thy plea, consider this,
 That, in the course of justice, none of us
 Should see salvation: we do pray for mercy;
 And that same prayer doth teach us all to
 render
 The deeds of mercy.

Act IV, Scene 1.

No more striking scene exists in all dramatic literature than this where Shylock and Portia face one another for either the destruction or preservation of Antonio. Shylock, representing the Mosaic law, waits to "feed fat the ancient grudge" he owed Antonio, and Portia, the embodiment of the new commandment, seeking to save even that which rejects it; for "Love is the fulfilling of the law." Finding that Shylock is determined to refuse the salvation she offers him, she swiftly runs the malice to earth and, with keen intelligence, addresses the Jew as follows:

Portia.

A pound of that same merchant's flesh is
thine:

The court awards it, and the law doth give it.

80 THE MERCHANT OF VENICE

Shylock.

Most rightful judge!

Portia.

And you must cut this flesh from off his breast :
The law allows it, and the court awards it.

Shylock.

Most learned judge! A sentence! Come, prepare!

Portia.

Tarry a little ; there is something else.
This bond doth give thee here no jot of blood ;
The words expressly are 'a pound of flesh :'
Take then thy bond, take thou thy pound of
flesh ;

But, in the cutting it, if thou dost shed
One drop of Christian blood, thy lands and
goods

Are, by the laws of Venice, confiscate
Unto the state of Venice.

Shylock.

Is that the law ?

Portia.

Thyself shalt see the act :
For, as thou urgest justice, be assured
Thou shalt have justice, more than thou desirest.

Shylock.

I take this offer, then ; pay the bond thrice
And let the Christian go.

Bassanio.

Here is the money.

Portia.

Soft !

The Jew shall have all justice ; soft ! no haste :
He shall have nothing but the penalty.
Therefore prepare thee to cut off the flesh
Shed thou no blood, nor cut thou less nor more
But just a pound of flesh : if thou tak'st more
Or less than a just pound, be it but so much
As makes it light or heavy in the substance
Or the division of the twentieth part
Of one poor scruple, nay, if the scale do turn
But in the estimation of a hair,
Thou diest, and all thy goods are confiscate.

82 THE MERCHANT OF VENICE

Why doth the Jew pause? take thy forfeiture.

Shylock.

Give me my principal, and let me go.

Portia.

Thou shalt have nothing but the forfeiture,
To be so taken at thy peril, Jew.

Shylock.

Why, then the devil give him good of it!
I'll stay no longer question.

Portia.

Tarry, Jew:

The law hath yet another hold on you.
It is enacted in the laws of Venice,
If it be proved against an alien
That by direct or indirect attempts
He seek the life of any citizen,
The party 'gainst the which he doth contrive
Shall seize one half his goods; the other half
Comes to the privy coffer of the state;
And the offender's life lies in the mercy
Of the duke only, 'gainst all other voice.
In which predicament, I say, thou stand'st;

For it appears, by manifest proceeding,
That indirectly and directly too
Thou hast contrived against the very life
Of the defendant; and thou has incurr'd
The danger formerly by me rehearsed.
Down, therefore, and beg mercy of the duke.

Duke.

That thou shalt see the difference of our spirits,
I pardon thee thy life before thou ask it;
For half thy wealth, it is Antonio's;
The other half comes to the general state,
Which humbleness may drive unto a fine.

Portia.

Ay, for the state, not for Antonio.

Shylock.

Nay, take my life and all; pardon not that:
You take my house when you do take the prop
That doth sustain my house; you take my life
When you do take the means whereby I live.

Portia.

What mercy can you render him, Antonio?

Antonio.

84 THE MERCHANT OF VENICE

So please my lord the duke and all the court
To quit the fine for one-half of his goods
I am content; so he will let me have
The other half in use, to render it,
Upon his death, unto the gentleman
That lately stole his daughter:
Two things provided more, that, for this
favour,
He presently become a Christian;
The other, that he do record a gift,
Here in the court, of all he dies possess'd,
Unto his son Lorenzo and his daughter.

Duke.

He shall do this, or else I do recant
The pardon that I late pronounced here.

Portia.

Art thou contented, Jew? what dost thou
say?

Shylock.

I am content.

Portia.

Clerk, draw a deed of gift.

Shylock.

I pray you, give me leave to go from hence;
I am not well: send the deed after me,
And I will sign it.

Act IV, Scene I.

Antonio's demand that Shylock become a Christian would provoke a smile were the situation not so pitiful. What persuasive loveliness had Antonio's race ever offered Shylock's that could induce him to believe that its religion was superior to the faith of his fathers? No wonder Shylock leaves the court room hurriedly, saying, "I am not well." Here may we not give rein to kindly imagination for one moment and believe that the force of Portia's life-giving goodness may have penetrated into the dull suffering of his outraged sensibilities

and there brought the solace of a new understanding of the law—honored from time immemorial by his race—for “love is the fulfilling of the law.”

In taking Jessica, the Jew’s daughter, to Belmont, as the happy wife of a Christian husband, Shakespeare’s intention was not to lay another crushing grief upon Shylock. It was rather to show that as the old Judaic law of restriction gives way to the new Judaic law of the Golden Rule, so inevitably must Jew and Christian meet, not in the narrow highways of theology, not in the glamour of form, not in the bypaths of bigotry, or formulated creed, but upon the broad uplands of the First Commandment—“Thou shalt have no other gods before me”—and in its inspired inter-

pretation of that commandment from the teachings of Jesus, "God is Spirit and must be worshipped in Spirit and in Truth."

One of the philosophical doctrines introduced by Shakespeare into his plays is the power of music to soothe, uplift and redeem. Some modern thinker has said, and wisely, that more music is needed today in the educational world, from the kindergarten to the university. Through Lorenzo and Jessica, a pair of captivating and child-like lovers, does Shakespeare give forth this acceptable message of the efficacy of music. This doctrine is aptly allied to the idealistic philosophy embedded in this play, and again points to the fact that this great artist was thoroughly familiar with the

Book of Books wherein is recorded the music of the spheres, when “the morning stars sang together and all the sons and daughters of God shouted for joy.”

Portia, in her absence, has left Lorenzo and Jessica in charge of Belmont, and there, like happy children, they await her return. The sense of companionship in isolation that Shakespeare conveys through this scene is enchanting. Lorenzo in his appreciation of Jessica says:

Lorenzo.

Beshrew me but I love her heartily;
For she is wise, if I can judge of her,
And fair she is, if that mine eyes be true,
And true she is, as she hath proved herself,
And therefore, like herself, wise, fair and true,
Shall she be placed in my constant soul.

Act II, Scene 6.

On the night of Portia's return Belmont is flooded with moonlight. Lorenzo, walking with Jessica in Belmont's gardens, says to her: "The moon shines bright; your mistress is at hand; bring your music forth into the air."

Lorenzo.

How sweet the moonlight sleeps upon this bank!

Here will we sit and let the sounds of music
Creep in our ears: soft stillness and the night
Become the touches of sweet harmony.

Sit, Jessica. Look how the floor of heaven
Is thick inlaid with patines of bright gold:
There's not the smallest orb which thou behold'st

But in his motion like an angel sings,
Still quiring to the young-eyed cherubins;
Such harmony is in immortal souls;
But whilst this muddy vesture of decay
Doth grossly close it in, we cannot hear it.

90 THE MERCHANT OF VENICE

Come, ho! and wake Diana with a hymn:
With sweetest touches pierce your mistress'
ear
And draw her home with music.

Jessica.

I am never merry when I hear sweet music.

Lorenzo.

The reason is, your spirits are attentive:
For do but note a wild and wanton herd,
Or race of youthful and unhandled colts,
Fetching mad bounds, bellowing and neighing
loud,
Which is the hot condition of their blood;
If they but hear perchance a trumpet sound,
Or any air of music touch their ears,
You shall perceive them make a mutual stand,
Their savage eyes turn'd to a modest gaze
By the sweet power of music: therefore the
poet
Did feign that Orpheus drew trees, stones and
floods;
Since nought so stockish, hard and full of
rage,

But music for the time doth change his nature.
The man that hath no music in himself,
Nor is not moved with concord of sweet
sounds,

Is fit for treasons, stratagems and spoils;
The motions of his spirit are dull as night
And his affections dark as Erebus:

Let no such man be trusted. Mark the music.

Act V, Scene 1.

Ushered home by these heavenly influences of mellowed light and music,
Portia, as she enters the garden, exclaims:

Portia.

That light we see is burning in my hall.
How far that little candle throws his beams!
So shines a good deed in a naughty world.

* * * *

Music! hark!

* * * *

Nothing is good, I see, without respect;
Methinks it sounds much sweeter than by day.

* * * *

92 THE MERCHANT OF VENICE

How many things by season season'd are
To their right praise and true perfection!
Peace, ho! the moon sleeps with Endymion
And would not be awaked.

Act V, Scene I.

From this point the play runs swiftly to its close, with "right praise and true perfection" restoring Bassanio to Portia, Gratiano to Nerissa; bringing "a special deed of gift" to Jessica and Lorenzo, and the good news to Antonio that his "argosies are richly come to harbor, suddenly," drawing from him the expression of heartfelt gratitude to Portia: "Sweet lady, you have given me life and living."

With Lorenzo we echo, "You drop manna in the way of starved people."

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